

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Currently Amended) A system for guiding a riser in an offshore environment, comprising:

a hull;

a keel guide attached to the hull;

a keel joint disposed within the keel guide; and

a bushing mounted to the keel guide intermediate the keel joint and the keel guide, said bushing being releasably coupled to said keel joint, wherein said bushing is decoupled from said keel joint by relative vertical motion between said keel joint and said keel guide, said bushing comprising a plurality of wear inserts positioned to bear against the keel joint.

2. (Original) The system as recited in claim 1, wherein the bushing is releasably landed in the keel guide.

3. (Canceled)

4. (Canceled)

5. (Canceled)

6. (Original) The system as recited in claim 1, wherein the bushing comprises a clamp connector to couple the bushing to the keel guide.

7. (Original) The system as recited in claim 2, wherein the keel guide comprises a plurality of lock-down assemblies to prevent inadvertent linear motion of the bushing relative to the keel guide.

8. (Original) The system as recited in claim 1, wherein the keel guide comprises a landing feature in the shape of a bowl.

9. (Canceled)

10. (Canceled)

11. (Original) The system as recited in claim 1, further comprising a wear sleeve external to the keel joint.

12. (Canceled)

13. (Original) The system as recited in claim 1, wherein the bushing comprises a bushing member that acts against the keel joint, the bushing member having a wear coating.

14. (Currently Amended) A system for guiding a riser used in an offshore environment, comprising:

a keel guide having a landing feature, the landing feature being positioned to selectively hold a bushing mechanism, wherein the landing feature comprises at least one shoulder formed on an inner surface of said keel guide and an adjustable locking pin; and

a keel joint slidably positioned within the bushing mechanism, said bushing mechanism allowing sliding movement of said keel joint within said bushing.

15. (Original) The system as recited in claim 14, further comprising a bushing releasably landed on the landing feature.

16. (Canceled)

17. (Previously Presented) The system as recited in claim 14, further comprising a hull to which the keel guide is attached.

18. (Canceled)

19. (Original) The system as recited in claim 14, wherein the landing feature comprises a pair of shoulders.

20. (Canceled)

21. (Canceled)

22. (Previously Presented) A method for guiding a riser, comprising:
releasably attaching a bushing to a riser assembly;
passing the riser assembly downward through a keel guide;
landing the bushing in the keel guide; and
releasing the bushing from the riser assembly to permit linear movement of the riser assembly through the bushing.

23. (Canceled)

24. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 22, wherein releasing comprises fracturing a frangible connection.

25. (Original) The method as recited in claim 22, wherein landing comprises landing the bushing against a shoulder in the keel guide.

26. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 22, wherein releasing comprises moving a keel joint of the riser assembly through the bushing.

27. (Original) The method as recited in claim 26, further comprising utilizing a plurality of bushing wear inserts to bear against the keel joint.

28. (Original) The method as recited in claim 22, further comprising passing a tieback connector through the keel guide.

29. (Previously Presented) A device for use with a riser in an offshore environment, comprising:

a bushing having a landing mechanism, the landing mechanism extending radially outward for engagement with a surrounding keel guide, wherein the bushing comprises a frangible connector for temporary coupling to a riser assembly.

30. (Original) The device as recited in claim 29, wherein the bushing comprises an opening in which a keel joint is slidably receivable.

31. (Canceled)

32. (Previously Presented) A system for guiding a riser in an offshore environment, comprising:

a hull;

a keel guide attached to the hull;

a keel joint disposed within the keel guide; and

a bushing mounted to the keel guide intermediate the keel joint and the keel guide,

wherein the bushing comprises a retention mechanism having a plurality of spring-loaded pins that interact with the keel guide.

33. (Previously Presented) A system for guiding a riser in an offshore environment, comprising:

a hull;

a keel guide attached to the hull;

a keel joint disposed within the keel guide; and

a bushing mounted to the keel guide intermediate the keel joint and the keel guide, wherein the bushing comprises a retention mechanism having a plurality of swinging lock-down pin assemblies.

34. (Previously Presented) A system for guiding a riser in an offshore environment, comprising:

a hull;

a keel guide attached to the hull;

a keel joint disposed within the keel guide; and

a bushing positioned intermediate the keel joint and the keel guide, said bushing being releasably coupled to said keel joint by at least one frangible connection.

35. (Previously Presented) The system as recited in claim 34, wherein the bushing is releasably landed in the keel guide.

36. (Previously Presented) A system for guiding a riser in an offshore environment, comprising:

a keel guide having a landing feature, the landing feature being positioned to selectively hold a bushing, said keel guide having a side opening extending along a longitudinal length of said keel guide, said side opening allowing said keel guide to be opened and closed to increase or decrease, respectively, an effective internal diameter of said keel guide;

an actuating device that is adapted to open or close said opening; and

a keel joint assembly slidably positioned within said bushing.

37. (Previously Presented) The system as recited in claim 36, wherein the keel guide comprises a first internal shoulder positioned to engage the bushing and a second internal shoulder positioned to restrain the bushing against axial movement.